

Wolverhampton Archaeology Group

Project No 61

Excavation at King George 5th playing field, Wednesfield

by

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1.0 Summary

An archaeological excavation was carried out to look for evidence for Prehistoric activity following preliminary evidence from test pits. Evidence for a Bronze Age barrow (also believed to have been close to this location) was also sought.

The site is located at King George 5th Playing Field, Wednesfield, Wolverhampton, adjacent to Amos Lane.

The work was carried out by Wolverhampton Archaeology Group with permission from Wolverhampton Council. It was funded by a grant from the Council for British Archaeology Mick Aston Archaeology fund and was undertaken from the 9th to 11th June 2017.

It consisted of two trenches located over features identified by geophysics and test pits. Trench 1 was 20m long, the first half was dug north/south and was 10m long and the second half was dug at right angles to the northern tip for 10m to the east. The idea was to try to locate the southern and eastern boundaries of a circular feature found on geophysics. Trench2 was dug 2m south of Trench 1 over the location of earlier test pits and an area on geophysics which suggested there might be a settlement.

2.0 Introduction

King George V playing field is owned by Wolverhampton City Council. It is currently used as football pitches and is in use for the whole of the football season which extends from early August through till May. During the summer months it is frequently used by children, dog walkers and sports enthusiasts.

Examination of old OS maps shows the area to have been used as farmland (Figure 1) until development took place around the early part of the 20th century. The development has continued as one would expect as a city suburb until this is one of the few remaining open undisturbed areas. The football pitches are on a gentle slope leading up to the top of the field where the housing developments are situated.

After researching the history of Wednesfield and confirming with HER records that the village dates back to Anglo Saxon times, followed by the discovery of the HER records suggesting the possibility of a Barrow (North Low) once located in the area of King George V playing field (Appendix 7), an opportunity was presented for an excavation to pursue this possibility further.

Previous work at this site consisted of resistivity and gradiometry surveys and the digging of 6 test pits which indicated possible evidence of prehistoric activity and the finding of what could potentially be a clay floor with a large number of stake holes and a possible quern stone and rubbing stone.

A resistivity survey was undertaken on a section of the playing field near the western edge on the higher ground. The results of the geophysics, figure 6, identified a sub-circular feature, which measured approximately 20m x 16m. It also identified several smaller circular features, which measure approximately 8m diameter, located close to the larger feature.

The gradiometer survey, figure 7, mirrored the large feature and also identified a possible linear feature which ran near to the large sub-circular feature.

LiDAR, figure 9, of the playing field shows a large feature in the same vicinity as the feature in the resistivity and gradiometer surveys.

The results (a number of stake holes which appeared at a depth of 55-65cm equidistantly spaced and of a consistent diameter, along with possible post holes) of the test pits dug in 2015 and 2016 (previous projects 49 and 58) (Figures 2 to 4) confirm that there has been human activity of some description in that area. Finds from these test pits include a piece of worked flint, a possible rubbing stone, a stone which may have been used as a quern stone and fire cracked stones all suggest human activity. Finds also include pieces of shell and limestone (used to break down clay soil) and some post medieval pottery which may have been used as a soil improver.

In order to be able to understand what is actually there it was decided to undertake an excavation to discover what evidence there may be of the barrow and also to look further in the area surrounding the location of the test pits 4, 5 and 6.

Permission was gained from the landowner, Wolverhampton City Council, to carry out an excavation in the area. Funding was applied for and granted from the Council for British Archaeology Mick Aston's Archaeology Fund to enable an excavation to take place on 9, 10 and 11 June 2017.



Figure 1 Cornfield at the site of King George V playing field

The test pits relevant to this project were 4, 5 and 6.



Figure 2. Test Pit 4 at 50cm depth, showing stake holes.

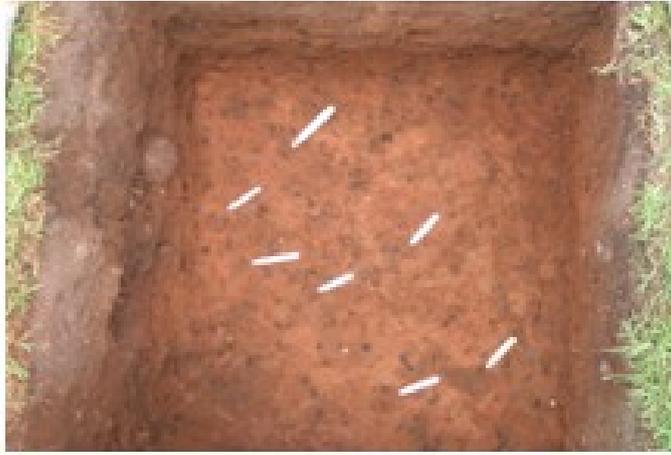


Figure 3. Test Pit 5 at 65cm depth showing a double row of stake holes.



Figure 4. Test Pit 6 at 66cm depth showing stake holes with a possible post hole.



Figure 5. Test Pit 6 showing a possible quern stone.

In Test Pit 6, a large stone thought to be granite began to appear at a depth of 35cm. The large stone was tentatively identified as a quern stone and kept along with a large pebble which was found next to it. The pebble had marks on one edge which looked possibly like it might have been used as a rubbing stone.

Resistivity and Gradiometry surveys at King George V playing field showed many interesting features including a possible circular feature.

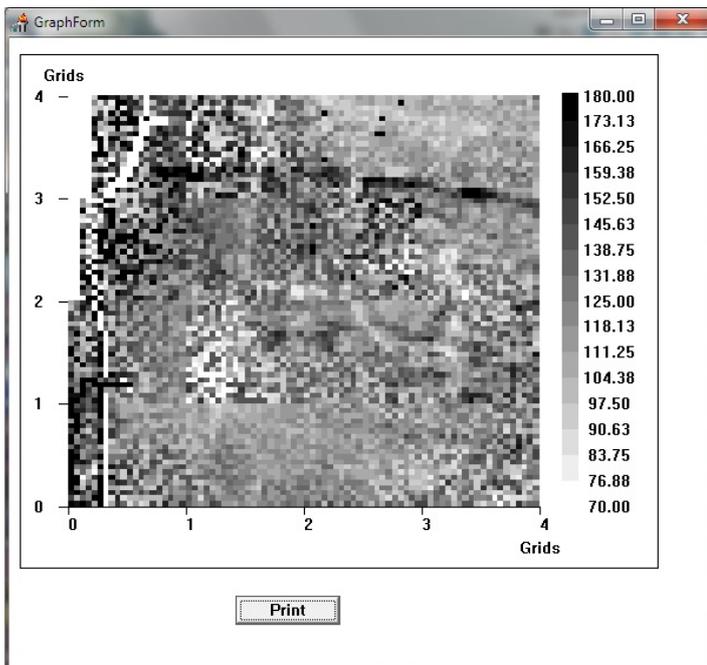


Figure 6. KGV Resistivity survey.

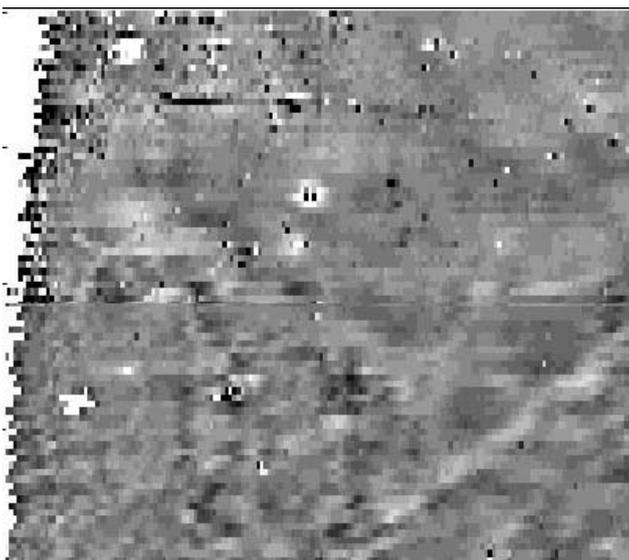


Figure 7. KGV Gradiometry survey.

2.1 Site Location

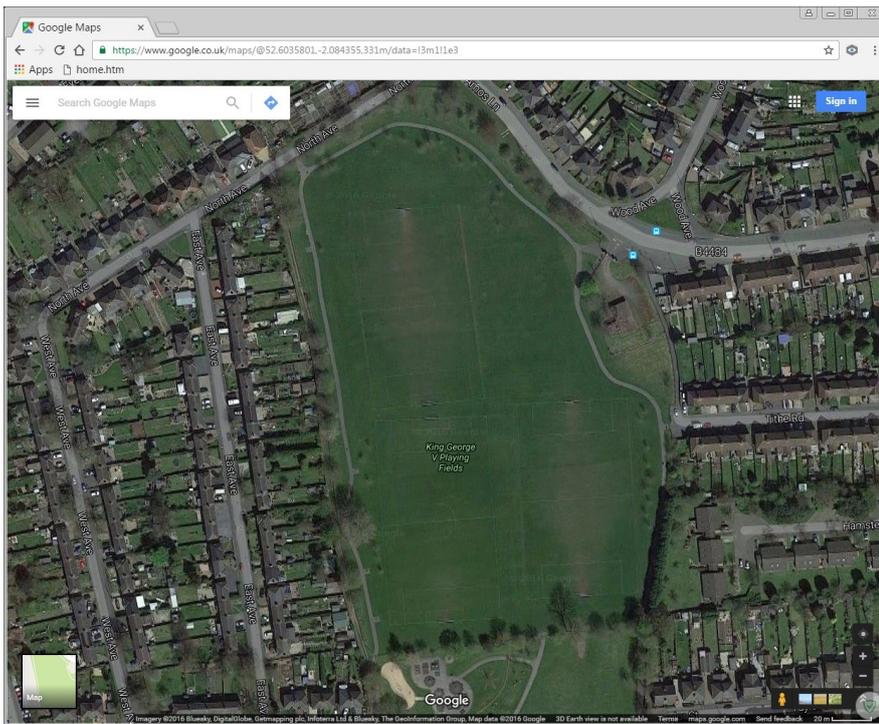


Figure 8. Location of King George V playing fields.

The site is just to the north of Wednesfield centre, adjacent to Amos Lane.



Figure 9. LiDAR provided by the Archaeology and Historic Records Officer, Wolverhampton.

2.2 Site History

It was in this area (Nordlow) that Dr Robert Plot in his Natural History of Staffordshire (1686) [1] says:
“There is another ground here too call’d North-Lowfield which no queftion heretofore has had alfo a Low in it tho’ now it is begone”.

The Anglo Saxon Chronicles mention a great battle between the Mercians and the Danes in the year 910 at Wednesfield which resulted in a resounding win for the Mercians with many Viking nobles being slaughtered although it is not clear whether the fight extended into nearby Tettenhall which also claims the battle site.

According to the Black Country History website [2], the earliest known references to Wednesfield dates to the 10th century when it is mentioned as the site of a battle between the Mercians and the Danes in 910. In the Medieval period, Wednesfield was a dependent settlement of Wolverhampton.

King George V playing field is said to be the location of a Bronze Age Barrow (Historic Environment Record 352, Appendix 7). It is described as North Low barrow, Wednesfield and recorded as a Bronze Age round barrow. There are also other possible burial mounds situated on the north side of Wolverhampton. This particular barrow is also reputed to be associated with the burial of the dead from the battle of Wednesfield (Tettenhall) in 910 AD but is more likely to be prehistoric.

Unfortunately, most of these other burial sites appear to have been built over and cannot be investigated, but the King George V playing field provided an excellent opportunity to investigate the possibility of unearthing Bronze Age activity there.

Antiquarian sources record a number of tumuli or barrows in the area, which are also preserved in the place names ending in “low”, such as Horselow (now Horsley fields), and North Lowe (now Nordley hill). There are four Historic Environment Records possibly relating to prehistoric barrows located in the general area of Wednesfield. 1. Stoman Low Barrow (HER 1506), Great Lowe and Little Lowe Barrows (HER2510), Tromelowe Barrow (HER 8700) and North Low Barrow (HER 352). Examination of their locations on a map demonstrated that the only remaining site which had not been built over was North Lowe. Occasional Bronze Age axes (particularly palstave type) are recorded as being found in the general location.

Previous work at this site consisted of resistivity and gradiometry surveys and the digging of 6 test pits which indicated possible evidence of prehistoric activity and the finding of what could potentially be a clay floor with a large number of stake holes and a possible quern stone and rubbing stone.

3.0 Objectives

This project was funded by a generous grant from the CBA Mick Aston Archaeology fund, supported by Historic England. This grant paid mainly for equipment needed to dig trenches and to fence off the site.

3.1 Objectives

Previous work at King George V playing field suggested that there were underground circular features to investigate. Test pits dug in this area showed the presence of stake holes around half a metre deep into the ground. The conclusion was that these may indicate the presence of prehistoric activity, possibly from the Bronze Age or even earlier.

3.2 Excavation

Two trenches were dug. Trench 1 was to validate the circular feature seen on geophysics, Trench 2 was dug as near as possible over test pits 4 to 6 to further investigate the stake holes discovered there.

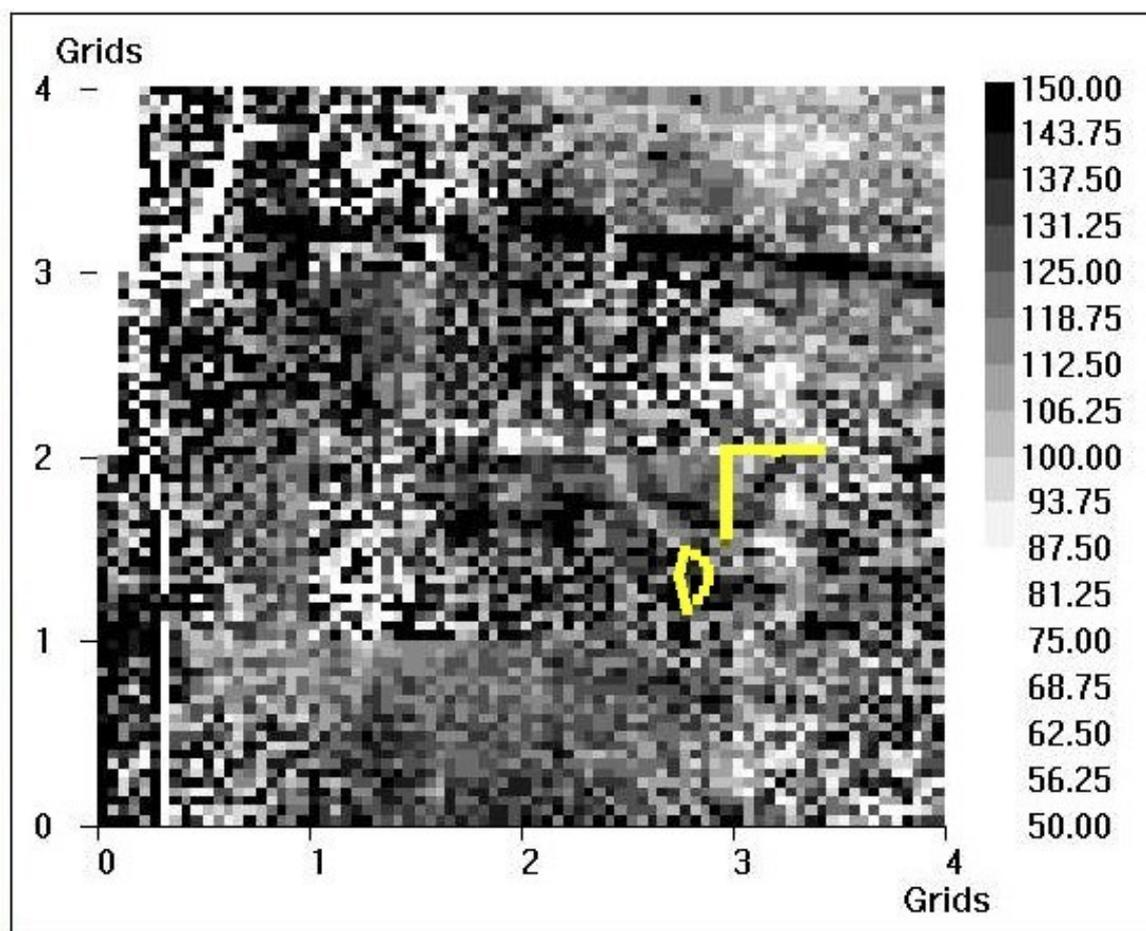


Figure 10 Resistivity showing locations of Trench 1 and Trench 2.

Trench 1 consisted of two 10m sections at right angles. The aim was to locate the southern and eastern limits of the circular feature. Trench 2 was a segment approximately 5m by 3m and was positioned over Test Pits 4 to 6

4.0 Methodology

4.1 Test Pits

Test pits can be opened, excavated and closed within one day and are suitable for use in public areas. They provide information about human activity but are not suitable for excavating archaeological remains (such as buildings) for which a proper excavation would be required.

- A metre square is marked out on the ground and turves carefully removed and stored so they can be replaced at the end of the day.
- Soil is removed 10cm at a time and carefully sieved.
- Any finds (pottery, glass, tiles etc) are washed and stored according to their depth
- Digging stops when finds run out or archaeology (building remains) are found
- The trench is filled in and the turves replaced

4.2 Geophysics

Gradiometry

The group uses a Geoscan FM18 Fluxgate Gradiometer (Geoscan Research). This consists of two sensors at right angles to each other. The upper sensor detects the earth's magnetic field; the lower sensor detects the earth's magnetic field plus any other field resulting from buried features. The signal from the earth's magnetic field can thus be electronically removed leaving the signal from buried objects. Readings are usually taken at half metre intervals along a fixed grid where the grid lines are spaced at one metre (traverse interval).

Buried objects can be detected through one of two mechanisms.

- **Heat (Thermoremanent Magnetism)** if a material is heated above the Curie point of iron oxide (>650°C), any iron oxide particles it contains become demagnetised. On cooling, the particles remagnetise along the lines of the earth's magnetic field. This produces a fixed magnetic field for the object relative to its surroundings. Typical examples include furnaces and hearths, to a lesser extent, walls.
- **Magnetic Susceptibility** certain materials such as iron can become magnetised when placed in a magnetic field. This displaces the earth's magnetic field which can be detected with the gradiometer.

Resistivity

The group uses a Geoscan RM15 unit, which measures the electrical resistance of soils. This is done using 4 electrodes, 2 current probes and 2 potential probes. They can be configured in various ways, but this unit uses a twin probe array. With this system, one current and one potential electrode (spaced 0.5 metres apart by means of a frame) are used to take the measurements by sampling over a grid pattern, whilst the other two are situated at least 15 metres away and form the pair of fixed probes. The readings are captured by a datalogger and can be later downloaded into a computer for subsequent processing. This method can detect buried objects about 1.5 times the spacing of the electrodes; in this case it is about 0.75 metres.

The resistance of soil depends upon its nature. The electrical current is passed by means of dissolved salts in the soil so wet soils pass electricity more easily than drier areas such as stone walls. Resistivity can be expected to detect the remnants of human activity such as walls, pits and ditches.

Data Processing

The geophysical data produced in the report is processed by a programme written for Windows by Martin Holland.

4.3 GPS referencing

This was done using a mobile phone to locate site grid origin at 500/500

4.4 Site Grid

A single measuring tape was laid out as a baseline, approximately north/south starting at site grid 500/500 and running to 480/500.

4.5 Measurement of heights

There was no access to a benchmark to establish heights so a Theodolite was used to measure heights relative to the nearest exercise platform by the footpath. This was given a benchmark height of 100m.

4.6 Excavation

Plastic sheets were laid out close to the areas of excavation and turves were carefully removed and placed on these so they could be reinstated later. Trench 1, one metre in width, was dug out by a mini digger and then carefully hand trowelled. Trench two, a bigger area, was also dug out by a mini digger to a depth of about 40cm as previous test pits had started to show archaeology soon after. Then Trench 2 was carefully scraped with trowels and features recorded.

4.7 Measurements of the site

All measurements were offset measurements made from the site baseline. Those for trench 2 were transferred to an Excel spreadsheet to provide a plan for trench 2.

4.8 Photography

Photographs of the site and details were taken with a digital camera, Panasonic DMC TZ20 and the images averaged 4 megabytes in size.

5.0 Results

5.1 Fieldwork

In 2016, a one metre square test pit was dug in this location revealing several stake holes at a depth of about sixty centimetres, each having a diameter of approximately six centimetres (test pit 4). The stake holes were possibly arranged in an arc within the SE corner of the pit and looked to be edging a hard red clay feature which on further investigation appeared to be a floor surface some fifteen centimetres in depth and contained flecks of charcoal. Unfortunately, because of the small size of the pit (one metre square), it was almost impossible to say if the stake holes were arranged in an arc or a straight line so it was decided to put in another test pit adjacent to this one so that more stake holes could be revealed and a better indication of their line could be made.

At this stage, Wolverhampton Archaeology Group was limited as to the size of the test pits by Wolverhampton Council as the agreement was to only excavate one metre square pits which could be opened, recorded and filled in on the same day which would overcome any health and safety issues concerning members of the public.

The following week, a second test pit was dug (test pit 5, incorporating part of test pit 4) in the hope of following the line of the stake holes to make an assessment on the nature of the clay feature. As it turned out, the feature had more of a curve than a straight line and a double row of stake holes became apparent surrounding the red clay floor. Whilst excavating this test pit, a piece of worked flint was found but it was judged to have not been in context due to ploughing of the area in the 20th century.

There was an air of excitement at this stage with the possibility of having a potential prehistoric structure under our feet so it was agreed one more test pit would go in to follow the line from the previous two test pits. So once again, the following week another pit (test pit 6) was excavated revealing more stake holes on a curve. Also during the digging of this pit, a large granite stone with a flat surface was found along with a hand sized smooth pebble thought to possibly be a quern and rubbing stone.

Following the finds from the test pits, in 2017 permission was given for an open excavation to be done on the site. This took place on June 9th to 11th 2017. The weather was hot and sunny.

The various datasets from the investigation are presented in the appendix section; Photographic and Computer Image record (Appendix 1), Context List (Appendix 2), Context Locations (Appendix 3), Context sheets (Appendix 4), Finds Register (Appendix 5), Special Finds (Appendix 6) and Historic Environment Record 352 (Appendix 7).

5.2 The Survey Area

5.2.1 Trench 1 (Dr S Davies)

As shown in Figure 10, Trench 1 consisted of two approximately 10m by 1m trenches at right angles to each other to try to locate the edges of the circular feature seen on the resistivity survey.



Figure 11. Trench 1 (middle ground).

Figure 11 shows the position of Trench 1 (in the middle ground) relative to the site grid baseline marked by a tape and a white stick.

5.2.2 Trench 2



Figure 12. Trench 2.

Figure 11 shows the position of Trench 2 relative to the site baseline and Trench 1.

5.3 Results

5.3.1 Trench 1 (Dr S Davies)



Figure 13. Southern end of Trench 1.



Figure 14. Southern end detail.

Trench 1 was initiated with the intention of investigating the large circular feature which, based on antiquarian records and Geophysics, has been postulated as a possible Bronze Age Round Barrow. The excavation of trench 1 does seem to prove the geophysics. A ditch was found in the southern end of trench 1

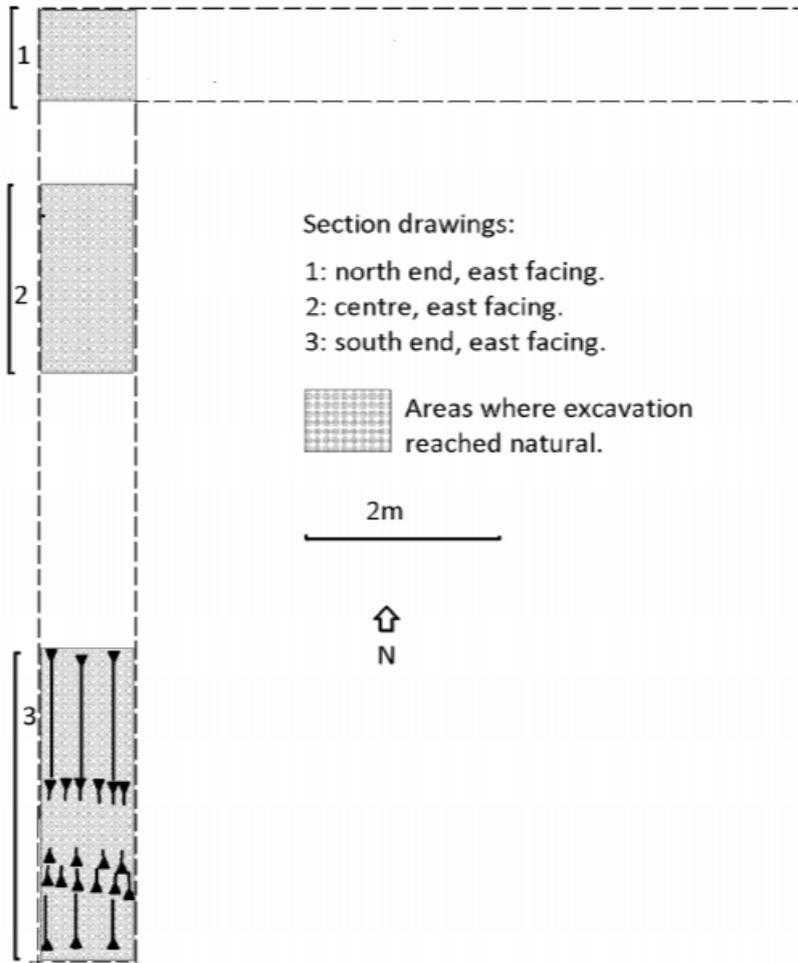
(the eastern end was not long enough to reach the supposed position of the ditch). Furthermore, just inside the ditch in the southern reach of trench 1, and in a corresponding position in the eastern reach, there was a higher concentration of cobbles compared to the surrounding area, possibly signifying either an elaboration of the inner bank, or that cobbles had rolled down a possible central mound at some point well after it was first created.

No dating evidence came from the ditch itself. There was a reasonable amount of post-medieval material retrieved from the upper layers across trench 1, which might suggest that the ditch pre-dates this period (due to the lack of post-med material in the ditch).. There were also worked flints found in trench 2, the most diagnostic of which suggests that there was certainly some sort of activity in this area in the later Neolithic or early Bronze Age

The upper layers of trench 1 did tend to slope from the centre out to the edges of the feature, maintaining the possibility that there was a central mound. However, the upper of these layers contained post-med material which would argue against the round barrow hypothesis given that antiquarian records suggest the mound was still extant up until a few hundred years ago. The fact that this area had been used for agriculture, the last known crop being a field of corn, provide the explanation for the post medieval pottery with ploughing of the land eventually destroying the barrow to ground level could provide a possible explanation.

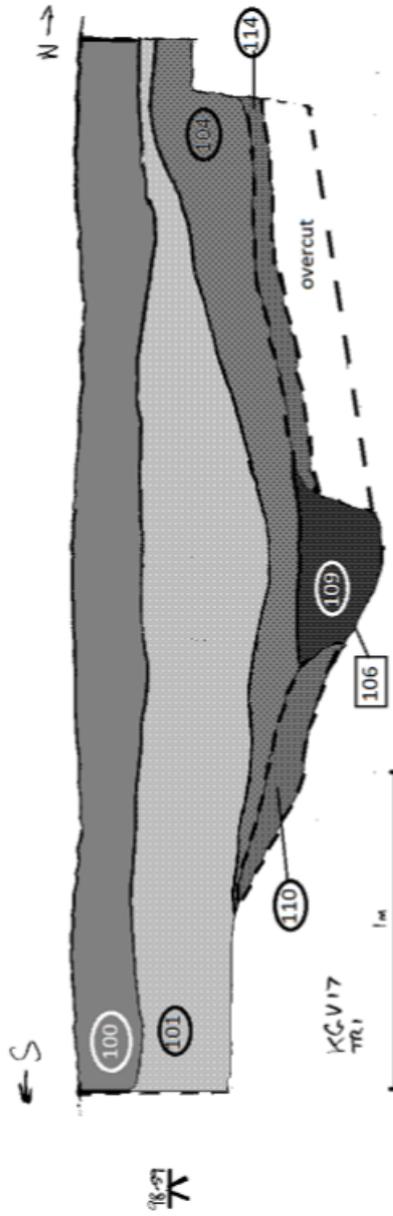
However, we have seen evidence from previous test pits that top soil (containing post medieval material) has been brought in to improve the growing capability of the earth in the area as well as the use of lime (burnt freshwater mussel shells) to break down the sub surface clay. The suggestion at the time was the land was poor and used for grazing purposes but over time, using these methods, along with suitable drainage techniques (such as ditches) improvements were made allowing the growing of crops. One other suggestion was that this particular feature might have been a rudimentary dew pond providing water for grazing animals.

Due to time and resource constraints it was not possible to fully excavate trench 1, thus the southern end (area of the ditch) received the majority of the attention. A 2m section part way along the southern extension of trench 1 was also excavated down to natural in order to produce a section drawing, as was the centre.



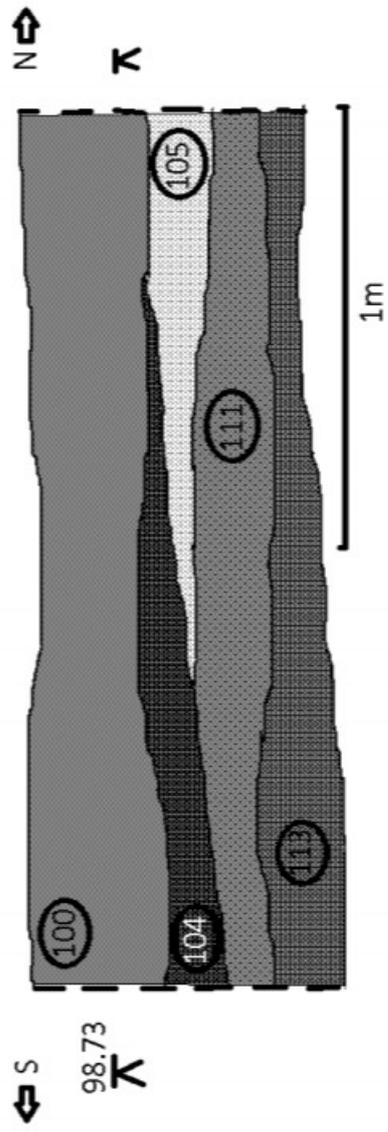
Ditch (southern end of southern projection)

Context	Description	Dating
100	Plough soil	
101	An orangey brown, sandy silt lying below the plough soil (100) and above (104).	Post-med material recovered
104	A layer that appears to run from the centre of the feature to the outer edge of the ditch. It's upper surface slopes slightly from the centre of the feature to around 1m from the inner edge of the ditch, and then slopes more steeply to a point above the centre of the ditch before rising slightly and ending on the outer edge of the ditch. Its lower surface slopes more gradually north to south. It sits above (111) in the north and (110) or the natural nearer to the ditch.	Post-med material recovered from upper part
109	Primary ditch fill, 0.3m deep in centre.	No dating material recovered
110	Appears to be an amalgamation of (104), (109) and natural, heavily damaged by tree root action, such that the ditch cut [106] was difficult to follow.	
114	Equivalent of (110) ?	
106	'U' shaped ditch cut. Clearly defined below (109), but vague between (109) and (110) & (114) due to what appears to be tree root action.	



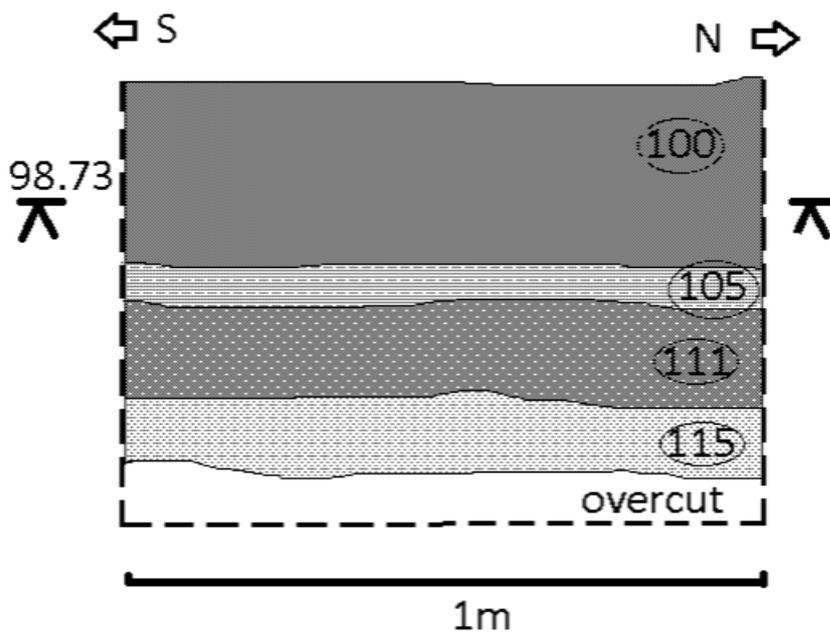
Centre of southern projection

Context	Description	Dating
100	Plough soil	
104	A layer that appears to start about 2m from the north end of the trench, and run to the outer edge of the ditch. It's upper surface slopes slightly from the centre of the feature to around 1m from the inner edge of the ditch, and then slopes more steeply to a point above the centre of the ditch before rising slightly and ending on the outer edge of the ditch. Its lower surface slopes more gradually north to south. It sits above (111) in the north and (110/114) or the natural nearer to the ditch.	
105	A layer that appears to run from the north end of the trench for about 2.75m. This layer also hinted at the possibility of turf outlines, which would be consistent with a mound built from turf stack. However, the outlines were extremely ephemeral, to the extent that they did not show up on photographs.	Post-med: ceramic, poss brick
111	A layer that appears to run from the north end of the trench and peters out into (114)	-
113	A layer that appears to run from the north end of the trench and peters out into (114) possibly a variation of (111) with more clay mixed in.	-



Northern end of southern projection

Context	Description	Dating
100	Plough soil	
105	A layer that appears to run from the north end of the trench for about 2.75m.	Post-med: ceramic, poss brick
111	A layer that appears to run from the north end of the trench.	-
115	A white grey, loamy sand layer that was only found at the northern end of the trench. Potentially an old land surface?	-



5.3.2 Trench 2

On the basis of the information previously gathered from the three test pits 4, 5 and 6, including the finding of several fire cracked stones from each, trench two was opened to try and incorporate more of the potential circular feature hence the strange shape of an extended arc. The structure's circumference was 'drawn' out on the ground using a rope from a central position which took in the arc formed by the stake holes. The estimate was giving us a structure measurement of some eight to nine metres in diameter. The intention was to try and incorporate the centre for a possible hearth, the SE portion for a potential entrance and the original three test pits to prove the continuity of the circle.

A mini digger excavated the marked out area whilst a watching brief was in place for any unusual finds or anomalies. At an approximate depth of forty centimetres, the digger was stopped and hand trowelling commenced. Results from the previous test pits had indicated that disturbance of the layers was still evident at this point from deep ploughing.

Very soon, as scraping continued, circular stake holes became apparent similar to those found in the test pits alongside larger round dark soil marks which were judged to be post holes. Almost all of these features created regular patterns in the earth either as a straight line or in an arc and some of the stake holes also created a double line seemingly radiating to the centre of the structure. All of the stake holes were indicated by a single white marker and the post holes by two as can be seen on the images.

Fortunately, there was only one 'intrusion' or cut into the structure (except for our previous test pits) and this contained a piece of clay pipe stem dated to about 1720 (context 205, figure 17). Other notable features included a red clay floor (as previously seen in our test pits) bounded by the stake and post holes, a large flat pad stone (context 206) thought to perhaps be a supporting pad for a post, and a cluster of three stones providing a support for a post hole (context 215) clearly seen in figure 16. All of these features can be seen on the final plan.

Three pieces of flint were also found all on the periphery of the structure. The first, special find 1, appeared to be a blade with integral tang; the second, SF 2, showed conchoidal fracturing and evidence of working. The third piece of flint appeared unworked.

On the afternoon of the third and final day, with time running out and the mini digger waiting to fill in the trenches, final measurements and photographs were taken somewhat hurriedly! (See figure 15).



Figure 15. Trench 2 at the end of the excavation, showing stake and post holes marked out.



Figure 16. Post Hole (7) flanked by supporting stones.



Figure 17. Sondage 2, context 205.



Figure 18. Possible post pad at entrance. Context 206.

KGV17 Trench 2 Plan 1
Planned and drawn by Jan and Martin Holland
Original scale 1:20

- Key:**
 PH Post holes
 SH Stake holes
 - - - Limit of Excavation
 - - - Cut
 + Site Coordinates
 ● Post Holes (PH)
 ○ Stake holes (SH)
 △ Special find
 — post pad
 — Stone
 — Test Pits
 ▲ Spot Heights

- Contexts**
- 204 Excavation over test pits
 - 205 Modern cut
 - 206 Post pad
 - 207 Post Holes
 - 208 Stake Holes
 - 209 Orange sandy layer with pebbles
 - 210 Light red clay with pebbles
 - 211 Darker red clay with pebbles
 - 212 Special Find 1
 - 213 Special Find 2
 - 214 Special Find 3
 - 215 Cluster of stones around PH7

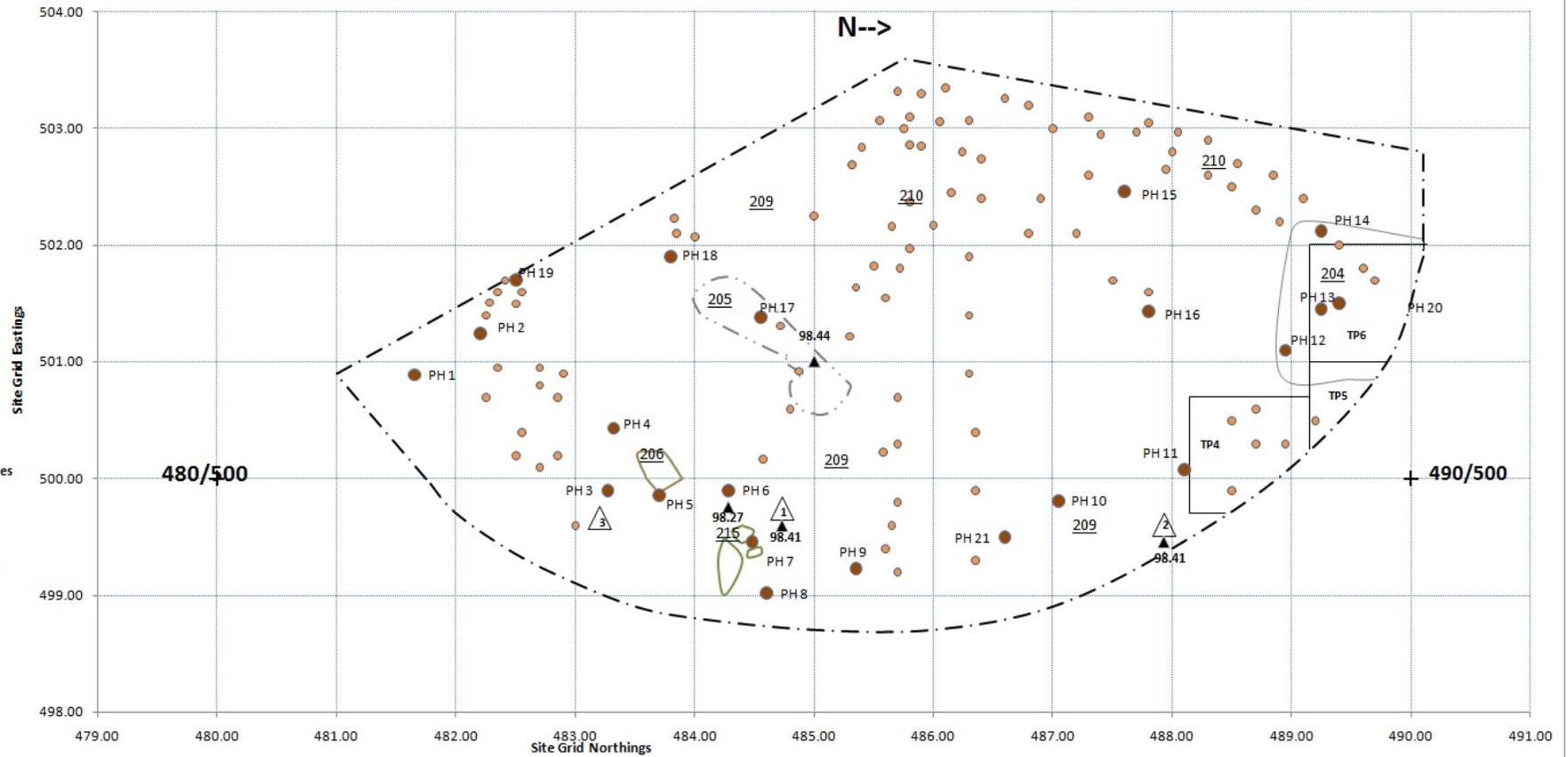


Figure 19 KGV Trench 2 Plan 1

5.4 Artefacts

5.4.1 Trench 1

None found

5.4.2 Trench 2

Three flints were found in this trench and identified as special finds 1 to 3, see Appendix 6..



Figure 20. Special find 1

Worked flint. An unusual small hafted cutting tool (probably a knife) from the late Neolithic or early Bronze Age. Date around 2000 BC. Size 50 by 20 by 5mm, elongated with a tang for hafting, some edges finely worked



Figure 21. Special find 2

Worked flint. 22 by 17 by 3mm. Conchoidal fracture and worked.

Special find 3. Flint chip, no evidence for working.

Additionally, a pipe stem was found in context 205 which was dated to around 1720.

6.0 Discussion

6.1 Trench 1 (Dr S Davies)

The excavation does seem to prove the geophysics. A ditch was found in the southern end of trench 1 (the eastern end was not long enough to reach the supposed position of the ditch).

No dating evidence was found in the ditch's primary fill (109). The upper layers had a reasonable assemblage of medieval and post-med material, the lack of this material in the ditch may thus suggest that it pre-dates this period, but, of course, does not prove it.

The geophysical plan suggests that the ditch has a diameter of approximately 16m. Context (104) appears to slope down towards the ditch from the centre, being consistent with the remains of a mound, however (104) contained a small amount of post-medieval material and (104) also sits on top of context (105) at its northern end which also contained a small amount of post-med material. This dating evidence allows us to interpret the feature in three differing ways: It may simply be that the contexts (104) and (105) represent deposits that have appeared in the centre of the ring ditch in the post-medieval period and have slowly shifted down into the upper part of the ditch to sit on top of the earlier fills. This would imply that if the feature is a Bronze Age barrow, either it was a disc or saucer barrow with no real central mound, or that the mound was gone by the start of the post-medieval period.

Neither of these explanations tallies with the antiquarian reports (Huntbatch, quoted in Shaw[3]) of there being an extant mound in the field in the 17th century. Given that the antiquarian reports (ibid., Plot[1]) suggest that there was a mound here, it may be that contexts (104) and (105) are the remains of this mound after traumatic plough damage, and that the post-medieval finds from them are the result of soil turbation: the postmedieval material being mixed in with the mound material by the plough. Some of these finds seem to post-date Huntbatch's report of the existence of an extant mound in the 17th century, thus it is difficult to see how they would have entered it but for incorporation by the plough or other later human action. If the material does soundly date contexts (104) and (105) then the mound would appear to be post-medieval rather than Bronze Age. This results in two problems. Some of the material may post date Huntbatch's report (17th century), which may mean that Huntbatch and Plot were not commenting on this particular feature. Furthermore, the lack of any such post-medieval material from the primary fills of the ditch would argue against the entire feature being post-medieval in date. In so far as the excavation has gone, it has done nothing to disprove that this is North Low barrow, as suggested by antiquarian records, or that it is Bronze Age in date. Indeed, given the shape of the feature it might even be Neolithic (at Burton Hastings, to the east of the West Midlands conurbation, what was assumed to be a Bronze Age round barrow of not dissimilar proportions was excavated by the University of Birmingham and is now considered likely to be Neolithic (Paul Garwood pers. comm.))

However, the lack of post medieval pottery in the ditch may just be that the circular feature was a dewpond predating the use of the area as agricultural land when soil improvement using soil imported from elsewhere was used. The amount of post medieval pottery found in the upper levels would support this as there is too much to be provided by local occupation. Furthermore there is no mention of the red clay soil found in trench 2 at the levels of prehistoric activity.

6.2 Trench 2

Due to the close proximity and number of stake holes and post holes encountered (see trench plan figure 18), it would be safe to say that this does not represent one single structure at one point of time; in fact there appears to be either more than one structure over a period of time or several repairs or modifications to one structure over a period of time. The structure(s) appears to have a red clay floor (at least 15 centimetres deep as evidenced by the test pits) bounded by post holes and stake holes and within the clay, flecks of charcoal are present. The shape of the structure appears to be either circular or very slightly oval and is about 8 or 9 metres in diameter; however, without fully excavating the entire structure, we cannot be sure. There is some evidence for an opening into the structure (if the post holes and post pad are correctly identified) to the SE/ESE. On a negative point, no central area containing charcoal or stone pad was immediately discernible at this depth.

The post holes seem to be arranged around an outer band on a regular circular distribution and on an inner band on a less regular basis but still possibly surrounding a central point. With a diameter of around 20 centimetres, the posts would almost certainly be able to support a substantial roof and would therefore suggest this structure could be a roundhouse with either a domestic or agricultural function. Without the inner post holes being present, there could be a suggestion that the outer ring of posts could have formed some form of animal enclosure fence but the sheer size of the posts would be overkill for such a structure and why the red clay floor with charcoal flecks? Animal enclosures which are outside and prone to the elements would be best served with a stony floor to reduce erosion of the surface.

Looking at the red clay floor, context 210, it is enclosed within the posts and stakes and has a depth of at least 15 centimetres in places. Underneath the clay there was a hard layer of compacted angular greenish stones up to several centimetres in length (which could be seen in context 205, the recent intrusion containing the piece of clay pipe), the depth of which was unknown and seemed to act as hardcore for the floor. Flecks of charcoal could be seen on a regular basis as black streaks during trowelling. Again, this seems indicative of a domestic environment close to where an area of burning has been present.

Moving on to the SE part of the trench, there is a flat stone pad (context 206) which could have easily supported a post consistent with the size of the others and adjacent to it, post hole 7; these two posts could have formed an entrance to the house. There is also a suggestion that post hole 7 might have proved troublesome during its lifetime as it needed to be wedged by three stones. Other post holes are also close together in this location maybe indicating disturbed or broken posts during the life of the structure caused by constant contact from entry and exit from the house. One other point of note is the alignment of this potential entrance which is SE/ESE and sits nicely alongside the findings of the majority of other prehistoric roundhouses with their doorways facing in that direction. As to why this was done no one is quite sure but no doubt the rising sun giving light and the shelter from prevalent winds from the SW would have played a part.

What can be said of the numerous stake holes encountered during excavation? They can be seen forming straight lines, double lines, arcs and circles within the structure but no doubt not all have been discovered or noticed and maybe some have been interpreted wrongly. However, saying that, there are definitely patterns. Probably the most intriguing are the double row holes radiating from the centre of the structure which are quite distinct and during excavation, it was noticed that there was a lighter clay-like material in the middle of the row which could suggest there was a solid infill between the stakes. As we have all probably seen, a single row of suitable sized stakes could be interwoven with hazel or some other flexible branches to produce a very strong fencing capable of withstanding great force but if that was doubled and infilled to a thickness of 30 centimetres with a hardened clay mix then the resulting wall would be exceptionally strong. But why would there be a need for such a wall within a domestic building? Surely a single wattle and daub fence or wall would be fine within a roundhouse to provide privacy, division or protection? But what if the roundhouse had gone out of use and was not suitable to live in and had then been converted to a farm

building? Perhaps it could have been adapted for cattle instead with each segment housing a cow during the winter months and the walls would be able to withstand the rigours because of their construction? As previously mentioned, at this level no central hearth was apparent but that does not mean to say the hearth was not there before the roundhouse was adapted for farm animals. Perhaps the walls were built and the floor repaired in preparation for animal usage. In hindsight, this theory might have been more positively accepted if soil samples had been taken from the area and tested for phosphates but unfortunately was overlooked. Excavation just reached the top of the clay floor but there may have been a fireplace discovered underneath if time had allowed scraping to continue deeper down into the floor. Charcoal was present as flecks and could be seen smearing as trowelling continued over the clay floor.

Could the building have been used for winter storage purposes again if it was unfit for human use? Vast amounts of animal fodder would be needed if animals were kept, even if the stock numbers were reduced to survive the winter months. Maybe some sort of boarding could be supported on the walls to keep foodstuffs off the floor and away from vermin and scavengers.

These are just a couple of ideas as to last usage, and no doubt there are many more viable propositions that can be put forward but the discussion must include the finds that were made during the digging of the trench and the test pits.

Special find one, described as an unusual flint small hafted cutting tool (probably a knife with a wooden handle), was found right on the arc of the post holes near to the suspected entrance into the structure. Was this a deliberate offering or was it a casual loss? Looking at the totality of flint found, only two other tiny pieces came to light and one of those was unworked. Flint is not native to this part of the country and so would be a rare commodity in prehistoric times having to be brought many miles probably from the east of the country. To lose such a precious item as this knife would be quite a blow so great care would have been taken over its whereabouts. Perhaps if it was discovered in open ground then maybe it could be assumed as a 'casual loss' but under a canopy of a roof there would be a good chance of noticing it if it had fallen down from a wall or slipped from an item of clothing, thus suggesting its placement was deliberate.

Test pit six contained a possible saddle quern and rubbing stone and interestingly they were situated just on the inside of the arc formed by post and stake holes. The position of these two items might indicate they were not in use at the time and were being stored inside the building right at the edge away from harm. No 'closure' of the structure was evident with stones blocking the entrance or the quern being buried as a final act suggesting maybe the building went out of use or was abandoned. There was no evidence also of fire as the post holes were clean of charcoal.

What else can be said about the structure or the finds? On a negative point, no associated pottery was found which might have helped to date the structure but there is a tentative period for the flint knife which is late Neolithic to early Bronze Age (about 2000BC). Occasional fire cracked stones were found throughout the trench and the test pits suggesting domestic activity with either cooking, heating of water or both.

7.0 Conclusion

On the basis of what was seen in 6 test pits on King George V playing fields, this project was principally designed to look for evidence of prehistory in Wednesfield. Documentary evidence from the 17th century also told us of a barrow located on Nordley Hill and the Anglo Saxon Chronicle spoke of a great battle between the Mercians and the Danes in 910 AD in this area heightening the anticipation of what might turn up if fortune prevailed. It was a big ask to find something relating to all three especially as the surrounding area is heavily built up and has been for a hundred years or more; so it was quite astonishing and amazing that such fragile evidence for prehistoric activity came to light after having lain undisturbed for thousands of years! The downside of the project was no evidence was forthcoming for the battle or the barrow but this was easily outweighed by the sheer number of post holes and stake holes visible in the ground.

On the basis of the evidence discovered, i.e. the post holes, stake holes, the clay floor, the shape of structure outlined, the size and the possible entrance it seems highly likely the building was a prehistoric roundhouse that had seen several modifications performed during its lifetime and had also maybe witnessed a function change in its latter stages. If time had allowed, more could have been discovered about what lay underneath and the first structure on site.

People were living there maybe four thousand years ago and they were sowing crops and making bread. They were probably herding animals which supplied them with meat, dairy products, skins, tools and manure for the crops. They had links to traders who were able to supply them with flint and they cooked using fires and heated pebbles. There was timber and thatch available to make a comfortable house along with suitable clay to make a resilient floor to sit on.

Less than a kilometre away to the south lies the church of St Thomas and adjacent to the church is the site of the Garden of Remembrance, formerly back gardens of a block of terraced properties built in the early 1800's. Three test pits were dug here by Wolverhampton Archaeology Group three years ago and a couple of pieces of worked flint were found in the last pit. Could there be some link here between the two sites with an extended family or neighbour?

This project has been hugely successful for a number of reasons, the main one being that the history and understanding of Wednesfield has been pushed way back into prehistory maybe four thousand years or more. Until now, the earliest records only go back to the famous battle in 910 AD when mention was made in the Anglo Saxon Chronicle. If population estimates by the experts for the prehistoric period are to be believed, occupation was thinly scattered so to actually find this roundhouse was akin to finding a needle in a haystack.

On a wider scale, evidence for prehistory is scarce in the West Midlands area also because of urbanisation. Many archaeological sites have disappeared under hundreds of years of building work and landscaping and will probably never come to light as population growth continues. This particular site now perhaps ought to have at least some protection to preserve the fragile remains that lie just under the surface. What better way than to keep the football pitches in operation for the benefit of the community? Their ancestors lived and played here too! The results of this project will allow the Council to make an informed decision should any development of this site be considered in the future.

The local residents themselves came out in force to watch, talk and engage in the venture because they were very interested in what was going on. They wanted to learn about what their ancestors were doing, how they lived and how they survived. This was good for archaeology in general because it was happening in front of them and not on television. Question after question came forward across the fence from the local residents which were answered enthusiastically by members of the dig team. Something like this cannot be achieved

by just watching television. This is archaeology at the cutting edge with discoveries being made in front of their eyes.

As for Wolverhampton Archaeology Group, it's good to know that the technique of test pitting employed, based on Mick Aston's methodology, has proved successful and was the stepping stone for an area excavation. At test pit level, (especially one metre square), interpretation is very difficult but thankfully on this occasion proved to be correct.

As an enthusiast group, Wolverhampton Archaeology has learnt a lot completing this work because it has shown the value of test pitting and how successful it can be, even with modest resources. It also demonstrates that perseverance is the key and not to be put off when having to negotiate with public bodies and organise members of the public.

On the down side, the response from local schools was disappointing to say the least as a golden opportunity was missed to engage the pupils in their local history with a 'hands on' experience. This was on their own doorstep and not something that was happening at the other end of the country that one could only read about.

In conclusion, this experience was enjoyed by all participants and the resulting discovery has given the City of Wolverhampton and the residents of Wednesfield plenty to talk about and they can proudly say 'we have been here for over 4,000 years'.

Community Engagement

An information stand was set up adjacent to the excavation site, upon it were placed information posters kindly supplied by Eleanor Ramsey (Archaeology and Historic Environment Officer for Wolverhampton and Walsall), and sample finds from previous test pitting and other sites (so that members of the public could get "hands on" with archaeology. The stand was staffed by members of WAG. It is estimated that over 100 members of the public were engaged with over the three days of the excavation. A number of these indicated that they would like to take part in a future excavation. A number of local libraries have been contacted with regard to temporary displays from the project. These will probably take place after the next phase, once more is known. Likewise, lectures concerning the project may be given at local archaeological and historical groups' meetings.

Acknowledgements

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Dr S Davies

Community Police Officers

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Scott Gordon

Mazda Jenkin

Trevor Timms

Jo Thomson

Cameron Thomson

Elizabeth, a deaf volunteer who travelled all the way from Tamworth to take part in the excavation.

Also to the following WAG members:

Clive Westwood

Susan Foster

Derek Thom

Marian Paterson

Janice Holland

Martin Holland

Mike Durrant

Ann Jenkins

Eileen Matthews.

Heather Dunn

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References

- [1] Robert Plot, a Natural History of Staffordshire. 1686
- [2] http://blackcountryhistory.org/collections/getrecord/WOHER_MBL713/
- [3] Shaw S. The History and Antiquities of Staffordshire, 2, parts 1 and 2, 1801

Appendix 1 Photographic and computer image records.

Site



preparation



The turf cutter broke!



But the digger came to the rescue

Trench 1



Trench 1



Trench 2





Community activity





Appendix 2. Context List

<i>Site Code</i>	<i>Area</i>
KGV 17	King George V playing field

<u>Context number</u>	Description
<u>200</u>	Topsoil
<u>201</u>	Sandy, pebbles, brown 2-5cm infrequent
<u>202</u>	Light brown clay, pebbles 2-5cm frequent
<u>203</u>	Surface = <u>210</u>
<u>204</u>	Excavation over test pits
<u>205</u>	Cut containing a pipe stem dated 1720
<u>206</u>	Post pad
<u>207</u>	Post Holes
<u>208</u>	Stake Holes
<u>209</u>	Orange sandy layer with pebbles
<u>210</u>	Light red clay with pebbles including a parallel line of stake holes
<u>211</u>	Darker red clay with pebbles
<u>212</u>	Special Find 1 worked flint
<u>213</u>	Special Find 2 worked flint
<u>214</u>	Special Find 3 flint chip
<u>215</u>	Cluster of stones around Post Hole 7

Appendix 3. Context Locations

Context No	Type	OS location	Area	Date	Plan	Lies Lies above	Lies Lies below
<u>200</u>	Deposit					<u>201</u>	
<u>201</u>	Deposit					<u>202</u>	<u>100</u>
<u>202</u>	Deposit					<u>209</u>	<u>201</u>
<u>203</u>	Deposit					<u>211</u>	<u>209</u>
<u>204</u>	Deposit					<u>211</u>	<u>209</u>
<u>205</u>	Cut					<u>211</u>	<u>209</u>
<u>206</u>	Deposit						
<u>207</u>	Structure					<u>211</u>	<u>209</u>
<u>208</u>	Structure					<u>211</u>	<u>209</u>
<u>209</u>	Deposit					<u>210</u>	<u>202</u>
<u>210</u>	Deposit					<u>211</u>	<u>209</u>
<u>211</u>	Deposit						<u>210</u>
<u>212</u>	Cut					<u>211</u>	<u>209</u>
<u>213</u>	Cut					<u>211</u>	<u>209</u>
<u>214</u>	Cut					<u>211</u>	<u>209</u>

Appendix 4. Context Sheets

Context 200

Grid square(s)	Area/Section: Trench 2	Context type Deposit	Site Code KGV17	Context 100
DEPOSIT: / STRUCTURE:: 1 Name 2 Photograph 3 Compaction 4 Colour 5 Composition and particle size 6 Inclusions <10% occa/mod/freq 7 Thickness & extent 8. Comments	1. Topsoil			CUT: / FILL: 1 Shape in plan 2 Corners 3 Dimensions/depth 4 Break of slope top 5 Sides 6 Break of slope base 7 Base 8 Orientation 9 Inclination of axis 10 Truncated (if known) 11 Fill Nos 12 Other comments Draw profile overleaf
	2 Photograph.			
	3 Compacted			
	4 grey/brown			
	5 <u>soil, few pebbles</u>			
	6			
	7 15cm			
	8 .			
Stratigraphic Matrix Above <input type="text"/>				
This context is <input type="text" value="200"/>				
Below are <input type="text" value="201"/> to <input type="text" value="214"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>				

Context 208

Grid square(s)	Area/Section: Trench 2	Context typ Structure	Site Code KGV17	Context 208
DEPOSIT: / STRUCTURE:: 1 Name 2 Photograph 3 Compaction 4 Colour 5 Composition and particle size 6 Inclusions <10% occa/mod/freq 7 Thickness & extent 8. Comments	1. Stake Holes	CUT: / FILL: 1 Shape in plan 2 Corners 3 Dimensions/depth 4 Break of slope top 5 Sides 6 Break of slope base 7 Base 8 Orientation 9 Inclination of axis 10 Truncated (if known) 11 Fill Nos 12 Other comments Draw profile overleaf		
	2.			
	3. In <u>203</u>			
	4.			
	5.			
	6.			
	7.			
	8.			
	9.			
		PTO		
Stratigraphic Matrix Above are <input type="text" value="200"/> <input type="text" value="201"/> <input type="text" value="202"/> <input type="text" value="209"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> This context is <input type="text" value="208"/> Below <input type="text" value="211"/> <input type="text"/>				

Context 210

Grid square(s)	Area/Section: Trench 2	Context typ Deposit	Site Code KGV17	Context 210
DEPOSIT: / STRUCTURE:: 1 Name 2 Photograph 3 Compaction 4 Colour 5 Composition and particle size 6 Inclusions <10% occa/mod/freq 7 Thickness & extent 8. Comments	1.			CUT: / FILL: 1 Shape in plan 2 Corners 3 Dimensions/depth 4 Break of slope top 5 Sides 6 Break of slope base 7 Base 8 Orientation 9 Inclination of axis 10 Truncated (if known) 11 Fill Nos 12 Other comments Draw profile overleaf
	2.			
	3. Clay			
	4. Light red			
	5.			
	6. Pebbles			
	7. Depth 50cm			
	8. This context contained a double line of stake holes. More were found elsewhere in Trench 2 so stakeholes were given context <u>208</u> and postholes <u>207</u>			
			PTO	
Stratigraphic Matrix Above are <input type="text" value="200"/> <input type="text" value="201"/> <input type="text" value="202"/> <input type="text" value="209"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> This context is <input type="text" value="210"/> Below <input type="text" value="211"/> <input type="text"/>				

Context 213

Grid square(s)	Area/Section: Trench 2	Context typ Cut	Site Code KGV17	Context 213				
DEPOSIT: / STRUCTURE:: 1 Name 2 Photograph 3 Compaction 4 Colour 5 Composition and particle size 6 Inclusions <10% occa/mod/freq 7 Thickness & extent 8. Comments	1. SF2 Worked flint	CUT: / FILL: 1 Shape in plan 2 Corners 3 Dimensions/depth 4 Break of slope top 5 Sides 6 Break of slope base 7 Base 8 Orientation 9 Inclination of axis 10 Truncated (if known) 11 Fill Nos 12 Other comments Draw profile overleaf						
	2.							
	3.							
	4.							
	5.							
	6.							
	7.							
	8.							
		PTO						
Stratigraphic Matrix								
Above are	<input type="text" value="100"/>	<input type="text" value="201"/>	<input type="text" value="202"/>	<input type="text" value="209"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
This context is	<input type="text" value="213"/>							
Below	<input type="text" value="211"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Context 214

Grid square(s)	Area/Section: Trench 2	Context typ Cut	Site Code KGV17	Context 214				
DEPOSIT: / STRUCTURE:: 1 Name 2 Photograph 3 Compaction 4 Colour 5 Composition and particle size 6 Inclusions <10% occa/mod/freq 7 Thickness & extent 8. Comments	1. SF3 Flint chip	CUT: / FILL: 1 Shape in plan 2 Corners 3 Dimensions/depth 4 Break of slope top 5 Sides 6 Break of slope base 7 Base 8 Orientation 9 Inclination of axis 10 Truncated (if known) 11 Fill Nos 12 Other comments Draw profile overleaf						
	2.							
	3.							
	4.							
	5.							
	6.							
	7.							
	8.							
		PTO						
Stratigraphic Matrix								
Above are	<input type="text" value="200"/>	<input type="text" value="201"/>	<input type="text" value="202"/>	<input type="text" value="209"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
This context is	<input type="text" value="214"/>							
Below	<input type="text" value="211"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Context 215

Grid square(s)	Area/Section: Trench 2	Context typ Structuret	Site Code KGV17	Context 214				
DEPOSIT: / STRUCTURE:: 1 Name 2 Photograph 3 Compaction 4 Colour 5 Composition and particle size 6 Inclusions <10% occa/mod/freq 7 Thickness & extent 8. Comments	1. Support for PH7	8. This context forms a cluster of 3 stones around Post hole 7 and may have been used to support the post.	CUT: / FILL: 1 Shape in plan 2 Corners 3 Dimensions/depth 4 Break of slope top 5 Sides 6 Break of slope base 7 Base 8 Orientation 9 Inclination of axis 10 Truncated (if known) 11 Fill Nos 12 Other comments Draw profile overleaf					
	2.							
	3. Compacted							
	4. grey							
	5. Stones cluster							
	6.							
	7.							
	8. This context forms a cluster of 3 stones around Post hole 7 and may have been used to support the post.							
		PTO						
Stratigraphic Matrix								
Above are	200	201	202	209				
This context is	215							
Below	211							

Appendix 5. Finds Register.

Location	No	Description	Comment
Trench 1	1	Flint	This find did not get to the finds analysis programme so must be discounted.
		Post medieval pottery	Attributed to distribution in the plough soil.
Trench 2	1	Pipe stem, bore 5/60 th	The bore dates this stem to 1720.
	1	Worked flint	Recorded as special find 1. This appears to be a knife blade with a tang for hafting.
	1	Worked flint	Recorded as special find 2. A disc shaped flint worked around the edge.
	1	Flint	Recorded as special find 3. One flint chip, not worked.

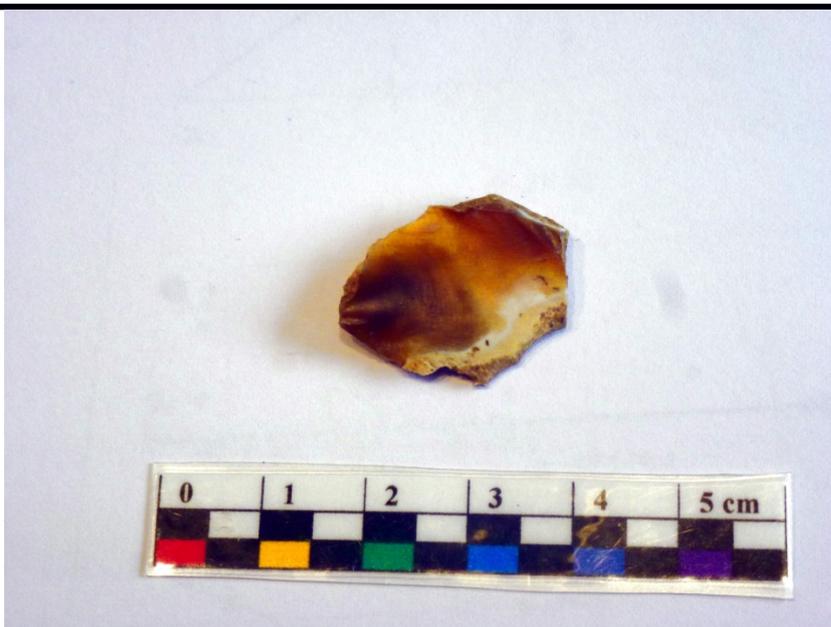
Appendix 6. Special Finds.

Small (Special) Finds Recording sheet

Grid square(s) Trench 2	Area/Section:	Finds No: 1	Site Code KGV 17	Context
Site Coordinates: 484.73E 499.74N		Levels: 98.41 (reduced)		
Plan/Section Nos: Plan 1		Photograph Nos:		
Method of excavation Trowel				
				
Description: Worked flint, an unusual small hafted cutting tool (probably a knife) from the late Neolithic or early Bronze Age. Date around 2000 BC Size 50 by 20 by 5mm, elongated with a tang for hafting, some edges finely worked.				
Provisional period	Group	Initials & Date		

Small (Special) Finds Recording sheet

Grid square(s) Trench 2	Area/Section:	Finds No: 2	Site Code KGV 17	Context <u>203</u>
Site Coordinates: 487.93E 499.66N		Levels: 98.48 (reduced)		
Plan/Section Nos: Plan 1		Photograph Nos:		
Method of excavation Trowel				



Description:

Worked flint, 22 by 17 by 3mm. Conchoidal fracture and worked.

Provisional period	Group	Initials & Date

Small (Special) Finds Recording sheet

Grid square(s)	Area/Section:	Finds No:	Site Code	Context

Trench 2		3	KGV 17	<u>209</u>
Site Coordinates: 483.2E 499.66N		Levels: 98.41 (reduced)		
Plan/Section Nos: Plan 1		Photograph Nos:		
Method of excavation Trowel				
				
Description: Flint chip, 20 by 10 by 3mm. No visible worked surfaces,				
Provisional period	Group	Initials & Date		

Appendix 7.Historic Environment Record 352.

North Low Barrow, Wednesfield

HER Number 352

Site Name: North Low Barrow: Wednesfield

- **Status:**

- Round Barrow (Bronze Age, Late Prehistoric, Prehistoric)

- **Associated Periods:**

- Bronze Age (-2350 - -701)
- Late Prehistoric (-4000 - 42)
- Prehistoric (-500000 - 42)

- **Brief Description:** A barrow or tumulus in this area is recorded in the 17th century. As with many of the possible burial mounds on the north side of Wolverhampton the barrow has been associated with the burial of the dead from the Battle of Tettenhall/Wednesfield (910) though it is perhaps more likely to have been prehistoric.

- **Description:** Huntbach (1639-1705) says that a tumulus was visible here when he was writing (quoted in Stebbing Shaw). (1) Plot in 1686 says that the tumulus has gone. (2) North Low Field lay near Stafford Road to the north east of Wolverhampton. Nordley Hill on the west side of Wednesfield is associated with Northlow Hill. (3) Nordley Hill is a hill made up of igneous rock which may once have had a mound upon it. (4) As with many of the possible burial sites on the north side of Wolverhampton the barrow has been associated with the burial of the dead from the Battle of Tettenhall/Wednesfield (910) though it is perhaps more likely to have been prehistoric. Location has been moved to that of Nordley Hill as shown on recent landline mapping. (5)

- **Tags:**

- [Round Barrow](#)

- **Sources:**

- (1) Bibliographic reference: Plot, Robert. 1686. The Natural History of Staffordshire.
- (2) Bibliographic reference: Shaw, Stebbing. 1801. The History and Antiquities of Staffordshire. Vol 2, Part 1. 2.
- (3) Bibliographic reference: Horovitz, David. 2010. Notes and Materials on the Battle of Tettenhall and other researches.
- (4) Bibliographic reference: Smallshire, J L. 1978. Wednesfield Field of Woden. 23.
- (5) Comment: Mike Shaw. 2011. Comment.

- **For more information contact:** [Black Country, Wolverhampton HER](#)

(Archaeology@wolverhampton.gov.uk)

- **Grid Reference:** 394426 300564